

**PRESS RELEASE**

## **New UN Task Force Is Launched to Curb Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds in South-West Asia**

*Landmark meeting under the Convention on Migratory Species  
convenes ten countries from the region in Riyadh*

**Riyadh, 21 May 2025** – A new front in the global fight against wildlife crime began today in Riyadh, with the launch of the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Migratory Birds Intergovernmental Task Force (SWAITBT).

Established under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the South-West Asia Illegal Taking of Birds Task Force (SWAITBT) brings together ten range states to confront the illegal and unsustainable taking of millions of birds each year, which has been driving flagship regional species such as the Steppe Eagle, several falcon species and Sociable Plovers towards extinction.

“This initiative brings governments in the region together to collaborate on a shared conservation goal which cannot be addressed alone,” said Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary of CMS. “By increasing the capacity of key players, aligning laws, enforcement and on-the-ground conservation across South-West Asia, this Task Force gives us a realistic chance to shut down the trafficking routes and illegal taking hotspots that have decimated iconic species. It is a model of multilateral cooperation that can deliver real results for wildlife and people alike.”

The National Center for Wildlife (NCW), as the CMS national focal point in Saudi Arabia, is leading coordination efforts on behalf of the Kingdom. NCW convened the inaugural meeting in Riyadh and continues to engage with regional and international partners to advance the task force’s goals.

Saudi Arabia is spearheading this coordinated approach to tackle the unlawful capture and trade of migratory birds. The launch reflects the Kingdom’s ongoing commitment to cross-border conservation, recently recognized with the CMS Champion, presented to the National Center for Wildlife for its active role in the protection of migratory species.

“Saudi Arabia recognizes the importance of international cooperation in protecting migratory birds that cross our skies and connect our continents,” said Dr. Mohammed Qurban, CEO of the National Center for Wildlife, in Saudi Arabia. “By supporting this task force, we reaffirm our commitment to conservation and to safeguarding species that are part of our region’s natural and cultural heritage. Working together, we can strengthen enforcement and ensure safe passage for these birds for generations to

come.”

## **An action-oriented mandate**

The SWAITBT gathers all ten range states—Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen—alongside international organisations, NGOs and enforcement bodies. To support CMS parties in meeting their conservation obligations, the task force’s core objectives include:

- Reviewing national hunting legislation and guiding legal reforms to close loopholes;
- Coordinating and supporting implementation of the South-West Asia Action Plan against Illegal Killing and Taking of Birds;
- Enable a regional situation analysis on illegal taking, building on work by the CMS Mediterranean and Asia-Pacific task forces;
- Ensuring synergies with related CMS frameworks such as the Raptors MOU, African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP) and the Central Asian Flyway Initiative (CAF);
- Promoting information exchange and capacity-building among enforcement agencies, customs and the judiciary;
- Advancing regional cooperation on enforcement by aligning regional protocols and bird-protection measures and tapping into specialist networks;
- Mobilising resources for priority conservation and enforcement actions; and
- Monitor the implementation of the relevant decisions and plans and their effectiveness and regularly submit progress reports to the governing bodies of participating MEAs, including via an intergovernmental ‘scoreboard’ to monitor and indicate progress in eliminating IKB

## **Addressing a global conservation priority**

The [State of the World’s Migratory Species](#) report, released at the 14th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, confirms that overexploitation is one of the two greatest threats to migratory species, with illegal killing (a subcategory of overexploitation) a major driver for many birds. According to BirdLife International’s [State of the World’s Birds \(2022\)](#), over-exploitation affects up to 45 per cent of all bird species worldwide.

This Task Force is set up in full coordination with ongoing CMS Avian Task Forces addressing illegal taking in other parts of the world, such as those operating for a decade now in the Mediterranean ([MIKT](#)) and more recently in Asia Pacific ([ITTEA](#)) Regions. The first model in the Mediterranean, has proven to be a successful platform of regional cooperation and exchange of information and best practices, where coordinated action has cut illegal bird netting in Cyprus by 91 per cent.

By adopting a full and proactive role in fighting against these illegal activities, countries will also contribute to the achievement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its target 5 on the use, harvest and trade of wild species.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **About the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**

An environmental treaty of the United Nations, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats. This unique treaty brings governments and wildlife experts together to address the conservation needs of terrestrial, aquatic, and avian migratory species and their habitats around the world. Since the Convention's entry into force in 1979, its membership has grown to include 133 Parties from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Discover more at [www.cms.int](http://www.cms.int)

## **PRESS CONTACT**

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